



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### Argentina

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion. In October 2005, following complaints from some non-Roman Catholic Christian groups, the Government eased the requirements for registration of religious groups.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 1,068,302 square miles and a population of approximately thirty-seven million, according to the 2001 census. Accurate estimates of religious affiliation were difficult to obtain; however, information supplied by the National Registry of Worship and representatives of various religious groups, as well as statistics from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), produced the following estimates, which do not necessarily imply active religious practice: Catholics, 70 percent of the population; Protestants, 9 percent; Muslims, 1.5 percent; Jews, 0.8 percent; other religious groups, 2.5 percent; and the remainder, no declared religious affiliation. Available estimates often were based on outdated census data and questionable presumptions, such as assuming that immigrants of Middle Eastern origin were Muslim. The Islamic Center estimated that only one of three Middle Eastern immigrants was Muslim, particularly those of Syrian or Lebanese origin; the majority of these immigrants were Maronites (Orthodox Catholic). Of the Muslim population of 500,000 to 600,000, the Islamic Center estimated that 93 percent were Sunni and 7 percent Shiite.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### *Legal/Policy Framework*

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The constitution grants all residents the right "to profess their faith freely" and states that foreigners enjoy all the civil rights of citizens.

The constitution states that the federal government "sustains the apostolic Roman Catholic faith," and the Government provides the Catholic Church with a variety of subsidies not available to other religious groups. These subsidies, estimated at approximately four million dollars per annum, have been described as compensation for expropriation of properties that belonged to Catholic institutions in the colonial era. The Secretariat of Worship in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, and Worship is responsible for conducting the Government's relations with religious organizations in the country.

The National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI), an independent government agency under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, is charged with promoting social and cultural pluralism and combating discriminatory attitudes. INADI, which includes representatives of the major religious groups on its board, investigates violations of a 1988 law that prohibits discrimination based on "race, religion, nationality, ideology, political opinion, sex, economic position, social class, or physical characteristics." The agency also conducts educational programs, supports victims, and promotes proactive measures to prevent discrimination. In 2005 INADI released its national plan against discrimination, providing an analysis of the situation and discriminatory social practices as well as strategic recommendations to address the identified problems, including religious discrimination.

Three Christian holy days are observed as national holidays: Good Friday, Immaculate Conception, and Christmas. Legislation passed in April 2006 extended authorized paid leave from three days to seven for those observing the Jewish holy days of New Year, the Days of Atonement, and Passover, and also for those observing the Islamic holy days of the Muslim New Year.

Religious organizations that wish to obtain tax-exempt status must register with the Secretariat of Worship and report periodically to maintain their status. Possession of a place of worship, an organizational charter, and an ordained clergy are among the criteria the secretariat considers in determining whether to grant or withdraw registration. In October 2005 the Government relaxed the restrictions, granting registration to groups that formerly did not meet the necessary requirements, including the Amerindian *mbyá guaraní*, signifying the first instance in which the Government officially recognized an indigenous religion.

Registration is not required for private religious services, such as those conducted in homes, but it is necessary for public activities.

Registered religious organizations may bring in foreign missionaries by applying to the Secretariat of Worship, which in turn notifies immigration authorities so that appropriate documents may be issued. There were no reports from any groups that their affiliated foreign missionaries were denied visas.

Public education is secular; however, students may request instruction in the religion of their choice, which can be conducted in school or at a religious institution. Many churches and synagogues operate private schools, including seminaries and universities.

The Secretariat of Worship sought to promote religious harmony by sending official representatives to events such as religious freedom conferences, rabbinical ordinations, Rosh Hashana and Eid al-Fitr celebrations, and religious activities held by Protestant and Orthodox churches.

#### *Restrictions on Religious Freedom*

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

In February 2005 the Government called for the removal of the military's chaplain general, Bishop Antonio Baseotto, due to controversial comments the bishop made regarding the Government's reproductive health policies. (The position of chaplain general is appointed by the Vatican, although it is subsidized by the Government.) The Vatican refused to remove the bishop, and at the end of the period covered by this report, the bishop remained nominally in his position but was not providing any of the services or duties of the office, and the Government had removed its subsidies.

Jewish authorities expressed their concern over a judge's decision, in apparent contradiction of nondiscrimination laws, that a landlord could refuse to rent an apartment to a Jewish couple because of the landlord's fear of a possible (terrorist) attack. INADI issued a determination that the judge's decision violated antidiscrimination laws. The Delegation of Israeli Argentine Associations (DAIA) appealed the judge's decision and was considering requesting the judge's removal from the bench.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### ***Forced Religious Conversion***

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

### **Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination**

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. NGOs actively promoted interreligious understanding. Ecumenical attendance was common at important religious events.

NGOs promoting religious fraternity included the Argentine Jewish-Christian Brotherhood (an affiliate of the International Council of Christians and Jews), the Argentine Council for Religious Freedom, the Foundation for Education for Peace, and the Federation of Arab Entities (Latin America), known as FEARAB. Cooperation was particularly notable between FEARAB (Latin America), representing Muslims and Christians of Arab origin; the Islamic Center of the Republic of Argentina; and DAIA to prevent religious tensions stemming from political conflicts in the Middle East.

The DAIA reported an increase in anti-Semitic comments and graffiti. DAIA also noted its concern over increased receipt by individuals of threatening and anti-Semitic e-mails, although they attributed this activity to individuals rather than any organized

group.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy officers met periodically with various religious leaders and attended events organized by faith-based organizations and NGOs that addressed questions of religious freedom.

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